

**FINAL
AGENDA**

FOR THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE CITY OF BELEN PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION, STATE OF NEW MEXICO, COUNTY OF VALENCIA TO BE HELD ON MONDAY THE 14th OF JANUARY 2019 AT 6:00 PM IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS AT CITY HALL, 100 SOUTH MAIN STREET, BELEN, NEW MEXICO 87002.

ALL P & Z COMMISSION MEETINGS ARE VIDEO AND AUDIO RECORDED.

A COPY OF THE AGENDA MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE OFFICE OF THE CITY OF BELEN PLANNING & ZONING DEPARTMENT.

- 1. CALL TO ORDER**
- 2. ROLL CALL**
- 3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGEANCE**
- 4. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**
- 5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
Minutes of December 10, 2018
- 6. PUBLIC COMMENT 3 MINUTE PRESENTATIONS:** If more time is needed for presentation, please ask to be scheduled on the next agenda.
- 7. DISCUSSION**
Comprehensive Plan
- 8. INFORMATIONAL ITEMS**
 - a. Communication from the Commission and Staff
- 9. ADJOURNMENT**

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED

/s/

Lisa R Miller, Planning & Zoning Administrator

cc: Mayor & City Council
News Bulletin

Belen Chamber of Commerce
Belen Recreation Center

Belen Public Library
Belen City Hall

JERAH R CORDOVA
MAYOR
LEONA VIGIL
CITY MANAGER



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CITY COUNCIL
RONNIE TORRES
CITY COUNCIL
FRANK ORTEGA
CITY COUNCIL

CITY OF BELEN
PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION MEETING
MINUTES
DECEMBER 10, 2018

Chairman Steve Ethridge called the regular meeting of the Belen Planning and Zoning Commission meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

PRESENT: Chairman Steve Ethridge
Vice Chair Pete Armstrong
Commissioner Jim Lardner
Commissioner Gordon Reeves
Commissioner Claudine Montano

CITY STAFF: Steven Tomita, Planning & Economic Development Director
Lisa R Miller, Planning & Zoning Administrator

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Vice Chair Pete Armstrong moved to approve the Agenda.

Commissioner Jim Lardner.

Motion Carried.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

The minutes of November 13, 2018 were reviewed.

Vice Chair Pete Armstrong pointed out a few typing errors to be corrected and a few of the minutes that did not really capture what was said.

Steven Tomita said that it did. He was concerned about the data on the charts because it does not make the City look good. We have been going down and are now beginning to come back up but it does not show up on any of the census data. He is not sure how the Census is getting their information, whether it is through the Workforce Solution, or the State.

Vice Chair Pete Armstrong said that he understands that but for a knowable reader, we have to describe what these 2016 numbers are. They are not truly what everybody thinks of as the census data.

Steven Tomita said that they do a combination of data collections and projections. There is always an ongoing data collection. They do update on a yearly basis based on certain criteria.

Commissioner Gordon Reeves said that he understands it even though he was not in attendance of the meeting.

Chairman Steve Ethridge said that the minutes are not written verbatim. They are written as a summary of what was said and done.

Page 5 paragraph 5 was reviewed.

Vice Chair Pete Armstrong said that he strongly agrees with what this said but feels that the Commuters coming and going in and out of Belen to go to work needs to be included in the Comprehensive Plan. He feels it is under reported.

Steven Tomita said that this can be incorporated into the Plan itself but they are talking about the minutes of the last meeting and what was discussed at that meeting.

The minutes will be left as is except for the change on page 3 of 1016 to 2016.

Chairman Gordon Reeves moved to accept the minutes with the noted corrections.

Commissioner Claudine Montano seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENT – 3 MINUTE PRESENTATIONS

There were none.

PUBLIC HEARING WITH POSSIBLE ACTION

DISCUSSION

Comprehensive Plan

Steven Tomita informed the Commission that they would be reviewing a section of the Comp Plan that has been gone over on a previous discussion with corrections. He apologized for the chart information and said that Lisa did the best that she could with the information that she was able to obtain.

Lisa Miller informed the Commission that the front cover page of the Comprehensive Plan has been changed. All of the Council names and the Commission names have been changed to reflect what is present. MRCOG has been taken off and the Commission added. The table of contents will not reflect any changes until the document is complete.

Chairman Steve Ethridge said that it might not be a bad idea to add the City webpage to this information.

Lisa Miller said in the Introduction and Purpose nothing was changed.

Chairman Steve Ethridge asked if there is a difference in where it reference to the Comprehensive Plan and the Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

Commissioner Gordon Reeves asked if this is a definition and purpose of the plan.

Steven Tomita said that they are two different plans. The Comprehensive Plan in general is what we are working on and includes a Comprehensive Land Use Plan along with other Plans.

Vice Chair Pete Armstrong said that it also indicated how we would like the community to develop. Consistency and proper grammar plus putting forward our best foot needs to be a part of this. There are a lot of run on sentences that need to be addressed.

Steven Tomita said that it is now called a Master Plan within the State Statutes.

Vice Chair Pete Armstrong said that this should be changed throughout the document to the what the State Statues require.

Steven Tomita brought up the State Statutes which refers to this and all the criteria that this documentation required within this document. They looked at what is mandated by the state law. He informed the Commission that this document needs to reflect what is required by the State.

The Commission decided to change the name to Master Plan and include a description of what is required for this Master Plan under the State Statutes.

Vice chair Pete Armstrong said that what they are trying to do is demonstrate the good things that are happening and acknowledged the past but are now moving forward. We need stronger language saying that we are moving forward. When we are going through the required list let us look at complete sentences, clear goals, correct grammar and things along that line.

Steven Tomita said that is why he said to forget that page for now.

Commissioner Jim Lardner said that the use of bullet points may have been a better choice instead of long sentences. That may have been more understood. He asked if the first page needs to be a list of what is required by the State.

Steven Tomita said that the state statute is the key to this. The Master Plan needs to say where the City is going to go. Our guide is the State Statutes and we need to have this with us as we go through this document and make these changes. He said that the City already has some of this done. We have a Downtown Master Plan, a Redevelopment Master Plan, etc. that has already been created. These documents have to be incorporated into the Master Plan.

Vice Chair Pete Armstrong said, under Community Profile, we do not hammer home what is the highway grid that makes up Belen and support the lower half of Valencia County. That is very important. A lot of history is included but when you look at the grid we need to emphasize this to demonstrate just how centrally located the City of Belen is and how it brings all these surrounding communities into our area and our Master Plan.

Steven Tomita said that you can state the influence the surrounding areas have on Belen and how Belen influences the other surrounding communities. The traffic that comes through Belen is not

just Belen residences. This traffic is from all over the place. There is a population of around 30,000 that the City of Belen is actually dealing with. This population comes from all around us.

Vice Chair Pete Armstrong said that this needs to be elaborated and included in this document. It is very important on how Belen is going to move forward.

Steven Tomita said that the beginning of Community Profile deals with the history and then the next few pages address the present character.

Chairman Steve Ethridge would also like to add that 309 connects to HWY 47 and HWY 6 or 60.

Lisa Miller said that HWY 6 is in Los Lunas and 309 does not connect to it. HWY 309 only connects to HWY 47 and no others. It does not even connect to HWY 60, which is the one going to Mountainair.

Chairman Steve Ethridge said he is trying to say there is a way to connect to the other side of the mountains.

Steven Tomita said that we would play with the wording on this.

Lisa Miller said that she was unable to replace the regional map. She could not find a good quality map to take its place and will continue to look for one.

Vice Chair Pete Armstrong suggested that under, Present Character of Development, paragraph 2, the word yet be replaced by the word and.

Steven Tomita said that he did not like the whole paragraph and felt that it needed to be changed. The whole paragraph has a negative tone to it.

Vice Chair Pete Armstrong said that the word, Although, needs to be removed.

Commissioner Jim Lardner said that we need to add more specific items like the airport, housing, industrial and things such as this to the document.

Steven Tomita said that he would re-write the whole paragraph. You want to reflect that you have the small town characteristics and sense of community, however, this is what is also going on. People like to see there is a willingness to grow and expand but still keep that small town feeling.

Steven Tomita said on the next page, in the first paragraph, remove even today, because this is a negative connotation. He reminded the Commission that this is still dealing with the history of the area. If you want it to deal with the present also, then you are going to need to change the heading to this section. In this we need to decide whether we are talking about history or not talking about history.

Commissioner Jim Lardner suggested that the words "was coveted" be added in place of remains, even today.

Steven Tomita said that it would work.

The Commission changed to wording on the next paragraph to give it a more positive feel. Words were removed, replaced and adjusted. They adjusted the next paragraph to remove some of the run-on sentences. Nothing else on that page was changed. They changed to wording on the first paragraph on the next page to read “ John Becker arrived in 1871 introducing the role of the merchant to the Belen Community’. The structure of the last sentence of the next paragraph to remove excess punctuation and wording. In the next paragraph. They did the same to the next paragraph. In the last paragraph of the page they removed one of the and’s from it. On the next page they removed part of the first paragraph. The “Population and Housing” was discussed next.

Vice Chair Pete Armstrong said that the City of Belen has maintained population since 2000 because the new charts have dropped the information since 2000 and he would like to see some continuity from the paragraph to the charts.

Steven Tomita said that what needs to be said is that the City has lost some of its population since 2000 but is back on the upswing due to the recent recession.

Vice Chair Pete Armstrong said that the numbers show that there it is not just significant. When you look at 2000 to 2015 there is only a 300 difference in population. He feels that is not significant.

Steven Tomita said that he does not know if these numbers are correct.

Lisa Miller said that she took them off of the Census webpage.

Vice Chair Pete Armstrong said that he is just talking about the numbers on the charts that they have to work with.

Steven Tomita showed the Commission the numbers he was able to obtain from his census information that he has secure access to. The numbers are a little different. He said let’s be honest because all cities lost populations due to the recession. Albuquerque crashed and Phoenix lost thousands and thousands of people but it is now on the upswing.

Vice Chair Pete Armstrong said that we could say that as off 2016 numbers are starting to rise again.

Chairman Steve Ethridge informed Steven Tomita that the rest of the paragraph before the charts needs to be adjusted to reflect these numbers. He thought that the last paragraph of the narrative really does not even need to be there.

Steven Tomita said that shows that we went through a downturn since 2000.

Chairman Steve Ethridge said that the referenced 2.58 number bothers him and does it really need to be there.

Steven Tomita said what is interesting is that in 2000 the average household size in Belen was 2.61 and in 2011 it dropped to 2.59. With the recession the families have come together and it is now 2.62. On the national level it was 2.59 then it went to 2.67 then dropped down to 2.64. The next nationally numbers are along the same lines of what Belen shows. This shows that

nationally the families are not breaking up and moving away. Families are staying together. He will modify the charts to reflect the numbers that he has. He feels that the sentence needs to be adjusted to reflect this and not removed. In 2018 Belen is beginning to see that we are increasing in size. The information in table 1 will affect what is in the paragraph following that table. This needs to be addressed.

They moved on to table 2 on the next page.

Steven Tomita said that he will add to this by saying that Los Lunas overtook the largest municipality within the County is due to the overflow development of Albuquerque. He is not just going to let Los Lunas run with it and become this thing that overtook everything on its own. It is due to the overflow development coming from Albuquerque. Belen still has the strongest Economic Community. Most people in Los Lunas go to Albuquerque to work when in Belen, we have a high volume of workers that work here because of the railroad, the industrial park and manufacturing that happens here.

Vice Chair Pete Armstrong said that Bosque Farms has a very large population of retired people. Those that are not retired, primarily commute to Albuquerque to work.

Steven Tomita said that if you look at the traffic flow, the freeway going from Los Lunas to Albuquerque is packed and the traffic from Belen to Albuquerque is not.

Chairman Steve Ethridge asked if there was a place within the document that shows traffic counts and traffic flows.

Lisa Miller said that there is a place that shows this and it comes in later in the document.

Chairman Steve Ethridge said that maybe they should cross reference this information. He asked if the other Commissioner had any other suggestion for this page.

Vice Chair Pete Armstrong said that the questions he had were answered by Steven Tomita during this conversation.

They looked at the last page that they were reviewing.

Vice Chair Pete Armstrong this last graph looks good to him.

Commissioner Jim Lardner said that it was really interesting looking at the comparisons on the surrounding areas.

Lisa Miller said that she used the information from the census webpage and developed this graph to show the breakdowns of the populations of the different municipalities and the rest of the unincorporated area of the County.

Chairman Steve Ethridge asked if any of the Commission have anything else to say about the last graph.

Vice Chair Pete Armstrong said that when you look at the unincorporated area, they all come through Belen if they are in south Valencia County.

Lisa Miller said that is the population of the County minus the incorporated areas.

Steven Tomita said what bothers him is that his numbers are low. He has been reflecting that there are 30,000 some odd people in Valencia County. This graph is showing that there are a lot more than that.

Steven Tomita said that he would have the changes done for the next meeting.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

Communications from the Commission and Staff

Steven Tomita said that the Belen Economic Development Association has been trying to get input from the Community on how the 1-25 Bypass can move forward in development. They started out with the first meeting being very positive, the second meeting dropped off considerably, so it was recommended that they hold a public workshop. Before they had the workshop he was called by the Albuquerque Economic Development requesting information on the area because there was a manufacturer looking to locate here where there was quick access to the freeway and the railroad tracks, so we submitted our information. Last week he received a phone call that said that the manufacturer wanted us to fly to Atlanta Georgia to present our sites. There were two New Mexico sites, one in Belen and one in Los Lunas. There were other States that were selected and we were included. He flew out to Georgia. The meeting was a weird meeting in the respect that the manufacturer had expressed that the plant had to be built and completed by the end of 2019 so they could open their doors in the beginning of 2020. He was concerned that we did not have the interchange completed at that time. The developer of Rancho Cielo attended and said that the interchange would be completed if this location was selected. This manufacturer then changed their minds and said that they could go slow to accommodate the completion of the project. He is there thinking, "What do you want." And that was a little frustrating. Albuquerque Economic Development gave a real good presentation of New Mexico and the greater Albuquerque area. Tim Cummings from the Industrial Hub presented for the Los Lunas area. The realtor of Rancho Cielo presented that they had a site and an area that the railroad has approved and Los Lunas was saying that the rail switch is already there. They then turned to Jim Foster, with Rancho Cielo and started talking about how great he is and how great his company is and how they have set aside \$40 million dollars for the development of Rancho Cielo and then he turns around and says that this project is not big enough for them. He informed them that they need to select the Los Lunas location for this project. This caught him and the Albuquerque Development Director by total surprise and even the broker for Rancho Cielo along with the Manufacturer were surprised. That ended the meeting. Before we left I did get up and said that Valencia County has a good workforce and when Keter came in they hired 180 local people and they are only at half production. They had no problem at all recruiting employees. Clariant has 300 people so we do have the employment available. If they are concerned about hiring, don't be. He informed them that the products for these manufacturers is shipped in by rail and transport out by truck because Valencia County is the cheapest place within the United States to ship out by trucks. He brought this up at the workshop to emphasize that the developers are not waiting for the Villages, Municipalities of Counties to take care of them. It is the investors, developers and so forth, that are moving things forward. If Belen wants to move forwards you cannot ask the City what it is going to do for them. This was all explained at the workshop which ended up being quite an explosive meeting. Eventually everybody came together and said, yes you are right, if it is going to happen we all have to get together and see that it does happen. It ended up happening to be a good meeting. Circle K is going to be closing on the

property. They are hoping to break ground in early January. It is going to make a big impact on the area.

Lisa Miller informed the Commission that she will be off the last two weeks of the year. The last meeting of December falls on New Year's Eve and she asked if the Commission was going to meet at that time or if they would like to cancel that meeting.

The Commission decided to cancel the regular meeting of the Planning & Zoning Commission scheduled for December 31, 2018.

Steven Tomita said that the airport matter is still going on. There are a few glitches that still need to be addressed. They will not be bringing in apartments but are talking about tiny homes at this time. There was a little glitch with the Chinese Government that they are finishing up on. The reason is because they will not have to come in a build all of the apartments but just bring in clusters of tiny homes.

Vice Chair Pete Armstrong said that the BETA meeting/workshop was a good meeting. It is surprising how much animosity there is between the landowners located there, and not between themselves but against past decision makers.

Chairman Steve Ethridge said RIP to former President Bush. The Commission has decided to cancel the December 31, 2018 meeting, so it is canceled. The next meeting will then be held on January 14, 2019. The City of Elephant Butte has asked to be a part of the Rio Grande Trail. The next meeting will be in Santa Fe on the 20th and he feels that Belen needs to be a part of that.

Steven Tomita said that he would recommend that the Commission become very familiar with the State Statue concerning the Masterplan and then look at the document we are working on so that we can make sure they coincide as we go.

ADJOURN

There being no further business to come before the City of Belen Planning & Zoning Commission, Commissioner Jim Lardner moved to adjourn.

Commissioner Gordon Reeves seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

The regular meeting of the City of Belen Planning & Zoning Commission adjourned at 7:33 p.m.

Chairman Steve Ethridge

ATTEST: _____
Steven Tomita, Planning & Economic Development Director

3-19-9. Master plan; purposes.

A. The planning commission shall prepare and adopt a master plan for the physical development of the municipality and the area within the planning and platting jurisdiction of the municipality which in the planning commission's judgment bears a relationship to the planning of the municipality. The planning commission may amend, extend or add to the plan or carry any part or subject matter into greater detail. In preparing the master plan, the planning commission shall make careful and comprehensive surveys and studies of existing conditions and probable future growth of the municipality and its environs. The plan shall be made with the general purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development of the municipality which will, in accordance with existing and future needs, best promote health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity or the general welfare as well as efficiency and economy in the process of development.

B. Among other things, the master plan with accompanying maps, plats and charts; descriptive and explanatory matter; and recommendations of the planning commission for the physical development of the municipality, and for its planning jurisdiction, may include:

- (1) the general location, character and extent of streets, bridges, viaducts and parkways; parks and playgrounds, floodways, waterways and waterfront development, airports and other ways, grounds, places and spaces;
- (2) the general location of public schools, public buildings and other public property;
- (3) the general location and extent of public utilities and terminals, whether publicly or privately owned;
- (4) the general location, character, layout and extent of community centers and neighborhood units and the replanning of blighted districts and slum areas; and
- (5) the acceptance, widening, removal, extension, relocation, narrowing, vacation, abandonment or change of use of any of the foregoing public ways, grounds, places, spaces, buildings, properties, utilities or terminals.

C. Copies of the master plan shall be available at the office of the municipal clerk and may be purchased at a reasonable price.

History: 1953 Comp., § 14-18-9, enacted by Laws 1965, ch. 300; 1970, ch. 52, § 1.

COMPREHENSIVE

LAND



USE

PLAN

Belen City Council

Jerah Cordova, Mayor
David Carte, Councilor
Frank Ortega, Councilor
Wayne Gallegos, Councilor
Ronnie Torres, Councilor

Belen Planning & Zoning Commission

Steve Ethridge, Chairman
Pete Armstrong, Vice Chair
Gordon Reeves, Commissioner
Claudine Montano, Commissioner
Jim Lardner, Commissioner

Contributing Staff:

Steven Tomita, Planning & Economic
Development Director
Lisa R Miller, Planning & Zoning Administrator

COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN
for the
CITY OF BELEN, NEW MEXICO

Adopted by the City Council

**This document was prepared by the City of Belen Planning &
Zoning Commission.**

**City of Belen
100 S Main St
Belen NM 87002**

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PART I

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

A comprehensive plan is an official document that is adopted by a local government as a policy guide for making future decisions regarding the physical development and overall improvement of the community. The Plan indicates how the local residents and their elected officials would like the community to develop over the next 20 years and beyond. Moreover, a comprehensive plan is a legally binding document of the City that provides a basis for regulations and programs necessary to manage the current and future development of the City.

The ultimate purpose of this Comprehensive Land Use Plan is to present an array of strategies that will guide and manage future development in the City of Belen. The primary emphasis of this Plan is on land use activities as an indicator of health, character, and municipal functions in the community. An extensive public involvement process was conducted in the formulation of this Plan. Public meetings, workshops, individual surveys, and interviews of local citizens were used to reveal public opinions and attitudes concerning the present status and potential of Belen. The intent of this public participation was to ensure strong community support for goals and objectives and strategic action recommendations, which are incorporated in this Plan.

This Comprehensive Plan for Belen contains a "community profile" section which presents essential information on the regional setting, present character of development, local development history, population and housing statistics, local economy, transportation and circulation systems, and the major public services and facilities available to Belen residents. This Plan also contains trends and projections for population, housing, and employment that provide a basis for envisioning future development patterns and land use activities that define the community of Belen.

A key component of the Belen Comprehensive Plan process is the formulation of broad goals and specific objectives that imply a desirable future for the City. These goals, with their subordinate objectives, are presented in the following categories: Land Use: Distribution and Intensity, Housing, Transportation, Water Infrastructure, Public Services and Facilities, and Economic Development. These goals and objectives also set the stage for the more specific proposed strategic action recommendations. The purpose of the recommendations is to identify a variety of actions necessary to implement the Plan within critical (i.e., immediate), short, medium, and long-range timeframes. Implementation of this plan will be subject to the policy directives established by the governing body of the City, as deemed appropriate for the conditions and opportunities that may arise in the future.

PART II

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Prior to determining an overall plan for guiding and managing future development, it is necessary to understand and evaluate both the historical background and present-day conditions of the City. The subsequent community profile is an extensive overview of Belen, and is intended to establish a common understanding of the City and its inhabitants. This community profile describes the fundamental character of the City, with information and relevant statistics concerning the regional setting, present character of development, development history, population and housing, local economy, transportation and circulation, and community services and facilities that are available to Belen residents.

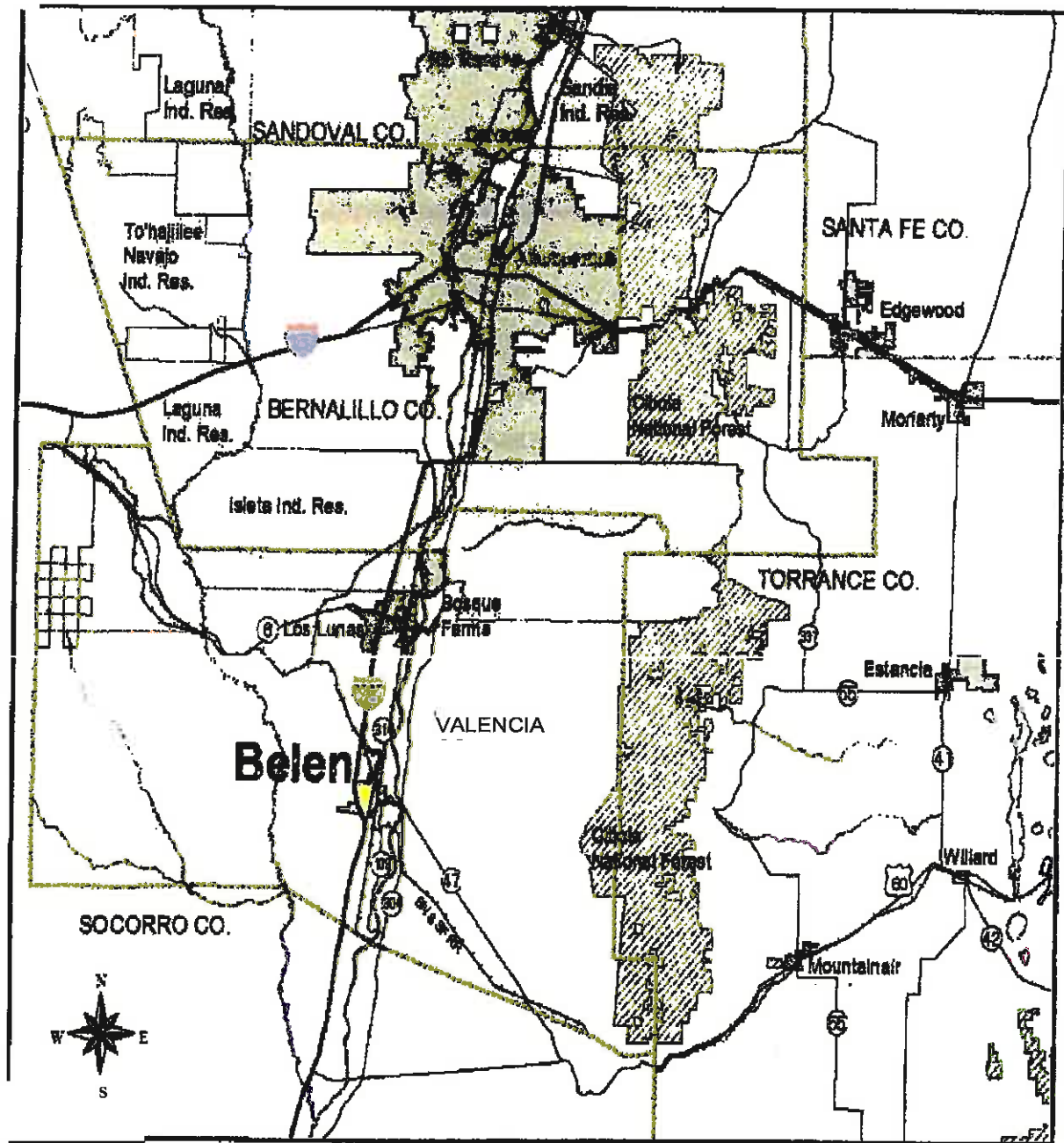
Regional Setting

The City of Belen is located in the southern portion of Valencia County; approximately 33 miles south of Albuquerque (see Figure 1). Geographically, the City of Belen is bordered on the east by the Rio Grande River and a gradually sloping plateau which leads up to the Manzano Mountains. To the west lies a mesa escarpment and uplands which form the divide between the Rio Grande and the Rio Puerco valleys.



Belen and Manzano Mountains

Belen's neighboring municipalities include Los Lunas, Bosque Farms, Rio Communities, Peralta, and the following unincorporated communities: Jarales, Adelino, Los Chavez, Pueblitos and Tome. Belen is the second largest municipality in Valencia County. The City is often referred to as the "Hub City" because of the numerous transcontinental freight trains that stop, refuel, and receive services in Belen. Belen is also situated on El Camino Real, which is a designated scenic byway and one of the oldest and most historic trails in the United States. El Camino Real (Royal Road or King's Highway) served as the main highway for the Spanish for over three centuries and extended 1,150 miles from Mexico City to Santa Fe. Interstate Highway 25 runs parallel to this historic corridor, and serves as the major roadway connecting Belen with Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Las Cruces, and El Paso. New Mexico Highway 314 runs through the middle of the City, serves as the City's Main Street, and connects Belen with Los Lunas (the County Seat). New Mexico Highway 309 runs east and west through the City connecting Belen with Rio Communities.



City of Belen
Comprehensive Plan
Figure 1
Regional Map

5 0 5 10 Miles

Present Character of Development

The urban form of Belen reflects a history influenced by both travel and transportation. The gridded street pattern adjacent to the railroad yards contains the historic business core of the community. Recent commercial and business development is spreading along the major regional highway corridors (N.M. 314, N.M. 309, and 1-25), and Camino Del Llano. This **linear** development is changing the character of the community, making it more dependent on vehicle trips. The major travel corridors run parallel to the river in a north-south orientation and in an **east-west orientation crossing the Rio Grande River**. In fact, east-west travel is inhibited by significant physical features; such as the Rio Grande, 1-25 and the railroad tracks.

Although Belen retains its small town character, there are a growing number of larger buildings and structures in the commercial and business areas. The City is experiencing greater density of development in the central business core area, yet there is dispersed development occurring in the outer portions of the City. Concurrently, the area of the City is expanding through annexation and is thus providing new lands for urbanization. In particular, the 1-25 corridor is inducing growth and pulling urbanization towards the western mesa.

Development History The earliest known settlements in the Belen area were established by Native Americans. With the coming of the Spanish in 1598, several ranchos were built in what is now Tome, Valencia (north of Belen) and Las Barrancas (south of Belen).

In the 18th century, the Spanish set their eyes on the Rio Abajo lands because of its agricultural value in the valley of the Rio Grande. The upper portion of the Rio Grande, from La Bajada Hill north (near Santa Fe), was referred to as Rio Arriba, while the lower portion **of the Rio Grande**, from La Bajada Hill south to El Paso del Norte, was referred to as Rio Abajo.

In 1740, a Royal Grant by the King of Spain was given to Captain Don Diego de Torres, his brother-in-law, Antonio de Salazar, and 31 other Spanish settlers to establish the community of Belen. The settlers were given industrial land allotments that became their land after living on it for five years. The settlement was known as Nuestra Senora de Belen, or Our Lady of Bethlehem. Later, the community was referred to as simply Belen.

The Belen land grant was situated in the flat valley on the west side of the Rio Grande. Dry tablelands (**mesas**) were found to the west and east of the valley and elevated to as much as 300 feet above the valley floor. Covering this tableland (**mesa**) were native grasses that became the grazing land for the herds of sheep of the Belen settlers. Though the Rio Grande was a slow-moving river, it deposited sediments in the valley around Belen for centuries, thus resulting in rich farmland.

Belen's section of the Rio Grande valley ~~remains, even today~~ was ~~coveted~~ as some of the finest agricultural land in New Mexico. The plains surrounding the Belen area were ideal for stock raising ~~,which figured~~ ~~figuring~~ prominently into the Belen economy at that time.

The Belen community thus ~~steadily~~ developed. ~~with little difficulty~~. As the population increased, settlers began to disperse into ranchos throughout the fertile fields of the valley. These ranchos were built around a plaza (town square) that could easily be closed off, in case of an Indian attack. The settlers diverted water from the river to acequias (ditches) ~~by using wooden shovels~~ to channel the water flow. Farming adjoined the various plazas, and sheep, cattle, and horses grazed in the common lands of the grant.

There was a military presence in Belen throughout its earlier years. In the year 1750, a military outpost was established in Belen to protect the missions and haciendas located along the Rio Abajo from Indian marauders. ~~,which~~ These marauders included, ~~but not limited to~~, the Apaches and Comanches from the east, and the Navajos from the northwest. Protection provided by the military against the Indians continued well into the 19th Century. Belen's last Indian raid was in 1864, when the Navajos swept into the City, driving off cows, goats, and sheep.

During Spanish and Mexican rule, sheep became the basis of the economy in the Rio Abajo. By 1840, New Mexico flocks had grown to an estimated one and half million sheep. By 1880, there were four million sheep, (most of which were located in the Rio Abajo) and this number did not decline until around 1910.

Historically, Belen has been known as a place of trade. El Camino Real ran along the east side of the river and linked Santa Fe with Mexico City. During the 18th century, mission supply caravans composed of ox carts carried friars, settlers, mail, religious items, merchandise, and various other freight materials along the Camino Real. Fur trappers and traders followed El Camino Real throughout the 19th Century. Belen was a port of entry for caravans moving south to Parral, El Paso, Chihuahua, Durango, and Mexico City. A branch customs house was also established in Belen in the early 1800..-s. Traders from Santa Fe often conducted business in Belen with any merchandise not sold at Taos, Albuquerque or Tome. Mutton, dried beef, chili, onions, and beans were taken to Bernalillo, Acoma, Laguna, and Socorro in trade for wine, grapes, and other commodities.

As a result of its various owners, many flags have flown over Belen throughout the years. Originally under Spanish jurisdiction, New Mexico was annexed as a territory of Mexico after the Mexican Revolution of 1821. Although Belen was loyal to the Union, the Confederate flag flew briefly over the City from March to July 1862. Finally, in 1912, New Mexico was admitted to the Union as a state. Belen was incorporated in 1918, and Bernard Jacobson was the City's first mayor (1918-1922).

~~With the arrival of~~ John Becker in 1871, ~~introducing~~ the role of the merchant ~~was introduced~~ to the Belen community. Becker was a German immigrant who brought goods from outside of the region into Belen and in return sold the raw goods of the region to eastern manufacturing plants. Becker realized a railroad cut-off that ran through Belen would contribute greatly to the City's economy. Becker made an enormous contribution to Belen by donating the land needed for the cut-off and 40 percent of the costs.

The arrival of the Belen cut-off in 1907 created a major boom in Belen's economy. The railroad's route initially entered New Mexico over the Raton Pass. As a result of the extreme grade of the pass, several engines were needed to haul the train over the pass. In order to alleviate this problem, a cut-off was created in 1907 that linked Amarillo and Belen through Abo Canyon. The Belen cut-off eliminated the wear and tear on engines coming over the Raton Pass and also helped the railroad to double track from central Kansas to Belen, New Mexico. The cut-off also required the construction of a roundhouse, cooling station, shops, 100-ton ice plant, depot, and the Harvey House. All transcontinental freight trains were required to stop in Belen for refueling, water, and to change crews. The railroad became a magnet for the rural population surrounding Belen, ~~in addition to luring~~ and attracted many unemployed eastern laborers.

The construction of the Belen cut-off and its support facilities impacted the community economically, socially, and culturally. It also dramatically affected the community by transforming its status from rural to urban. The population increased 300 percent during that time, and many farmers and families came to Belen to work for the railroad.

~~Even today~~ The railroad ~~has continued to support~~ supported the Belen community typically with ~~In 1980, the Santa Fe Railroad employed about 380 workers; primarily~~ train operators, and mechanical and freight office personnel. ~~In addition~~ Additionally, hotels provided accommodations for out-of-town workers, restaurants provided their meals, and stores provided their clothing, medicine, and other needs.

The first automobiles came to Belen in the early 20th century, thus creating a need for roads and bridges. Construction has been ongoing as the population and need has increased. After World War II the highway system was improved, which allowed citizens of Belen to commute to jobs in Albuquerque. In the early 1960's work began on I-25. The Interstate highway supports businesses that cater to travelers, such as hotels, gas stations and restaurants. ~~Auto dealerships are also actively involved in sales throughout the region.~~

Commonly referred to as the "Hub City", Belen ~~is still~~ remains an economic and social hub for the surrounding region. Belen has the only historic downtown area within Valencia County. Many people in the outlying areas come to shop at the local stores, socialize and pray at the local churches, and visit the variety of businesses Belen has to offer. The Harvey House, an eatery in its

former days located throughout the country, is today the only original such structure in the State still open to the public. The Harvey House is currently home to a museum commemorating the history of the railroad and the Harvey House, and the Harvey House Girls. sponsored by the Valencia County Historical Society owned and managed by the City of Belen.

Population and Housing

Belen is a medium sized municipality located in southern Valencia County. The year 2000 Census population of Belen was 6,901 persons. Table 1 displays Belen's population and housing data from U.S. Census information from ~~1960 to 2000~~ 2000 to the projected population in 2015. Although Belen lost some of its population 2.58 during the 1960's, the City has been steadily increasing in population since the 1970's.

Table 1
1960-2000 City of Belen
Population, Housing, and Households

Year	Population	Housing Units*	Households	Belen Average Household Size**	National Average Household Size
1960	5,031	1,471	1,354	3.72	3.33
1970	4,823	1,719	1,477	3.27	3.14
1980	5,617	2,230	1,963	2.86	2.76
1990	6,547	2,622	2,310	2.79	2.63
2000	6,901	2,952	2,596	2.61	2.59

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census and MRCOG

*Includes vacant units

**A portion of the population does not live in households, but in group quarters, dormitories, etc.

Table 1
2000-2015*
Population, Housing, and Households

Year	Population	Housing Units**	Households	Belen Average Household Size***	National average Household Size
2000	6,901	2,952	2,596	2.61	2.59
2010	7,269	3,346	2,887	2.48	2.58
2015*	7,209	3,229	2,673	2.68	2.54

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

*2015-estimated totals

**Includes vacant units

***A portion of the population does not live in household, but in group quarters, dormitories, etc.

Another trend shown in Table 1 is the decreasing ratio of persons per household. National housing trends for decades have been toward smaller families, more childless couples, and more singles. Belen appears to be following these national housing trends, and coming very close to the national average household size.

The other incorporated municipalities in Valencia County are Bosque Farms, ~~and~~ Los Lunas, Peralta and Rio Communities. Belen was the largest municipality in Valencia County until the 1990's, when the Village of Los Lunas overtook Belen as the largest municipality in the County (see Table 2 and Figure 2).

Table-2
1970-2000 Population

Belen, Bosque Farms, And Los Lunas

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

			1970	1980	1990	2000
Belen			4,823	5,617	6,547	6,901
Bosque Farms			—	3,353	3,791	3,931
Los Lunas			973	3,525	6,013	10,034

Table 2
2000 – 2015* Population

**Belen, Bosque
Peralta, and Rio**

		2000	2010	2015*
Belen		6,901	7,269	7,209
Bosque Farms		3,931	3,904	3,864
Los Lunas		10,034	14,835	15,281
Peralta		-----	3,660	3,625
Rio Communities		4,213	4,723	

**Farms, Los Lunas,
Communities**

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census
*2015-estimated totals

FIGURE 2
200-2015* Population
Belen, Bosque Farms, Los Lunas, Peralta, Rio Communities & Valencia County

